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For action

Recommendation for supplementary funding without a recommendation for funding from general resources**

Central America subregional

Summary

The present document contains a recommendation for supplementary funding for a subregional programme for countries in Central America affected by hurricane Mitch for which no recommendation for funding from general resources is requested. The programme proposal submitted here is aimed at expanding or complementing ongoing country programmes in the region in direct response to needs caused by the effect of the hurricane and to strengthen the disaster prevention and mitigation capacities of the countries and the subregion. The Executive Director *recommends* that the Executive Board approve supplementary funding in the amount of $25,000,000 for the subregional programme for Central America for the period 1999 to 2001, subject to the availability of specific-purpose contributions.

* E/ICEF/1999/15

** The figures provided in the present document are final and take into account unspent balances of programme cooperation at the end of 1998. They will be contained in the "Summary of 1999 recommendations for general resources and supplementary funding programmes" (E/ICEF/1999/P/L.16).

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The situation of children and women

1. In late October-early November 1998, a Class 5 hurricane struck four Central American countries. Hurricane Mitch caused extreme devastation in Honduras, severe damage in Nicaragua, and considerable damage in Guatemala and El Salvador. In all four countries, the poorest members of society were the hardest hit, in part because their homes were located in vulnerable sites, and in part because poverty left them vulnerable to the emergency conditions created by the storm. About one half of the population in each country is under 18 years old and, on average, over one half of the children in the affected countries live in poverty or extreme poverty. Therefore, poor children were most severely affected by the disaster.

2. Some of the worst damage was to water and sanitation systems, leaving millions without clean drinking water or adequate excreta disposal facilities, thus opening the way for disease and epidemics. Hundreds of schools were destroyed or damaged, depriving children of their right to education. Families lost homes and loved ones, creating emotional distress and despair, and thousands were relocated to shelters that were inadequate. Poor rural families lost their homes, crops and livestock, putting them at risk of dire impoverishment. Hurricane Mitch threatens to set back development progress in Honduras by a decade or more, and has further jeopardized the future of poor children in the region.

3. The four countries affected by hurricane Mitch are all characterized by wide rural-urban disparities in access to basic services, which include health care, safe drinking water, sanitation and education. These disparities have been exacerbated by the historic exclusion of indigenous populations from access to basic services. As a result, health indicators for children and women are generally poor, with relatively high maternal and child mortality rates and large pockets of persistent malnutrition. Moreover, all of the countries, except for Honduras, were just beginning to recover from more than a decade of internal warfare that had victimized large numbers of children, left many women to act as family breadwinners, and took a particularly heavy toll on rural populations. Due to a combination of poverty, lack of access, weak curriculums and cultural norms, large numbers of children and youth in rural areas work rather than attend school — a factor that will be exacerbated by the impoverishment caused by hurricane Mitch.

Previous programme cooperation

4. During the 1990s, throughout Central America, UNICEF has promoted policies and programmes to ensure the rights and improve the well-being of children and the poor. UNICEF's work has focused on harmonizing national legislation with the Convention on the Rights of the Child; ensuring access to sustainable basic social services for children and women through integrated local development projects; mobilizing local communities around respect for and the guarantee of children's and women's rights; increasing access to health care, water and sanitation, and quality education; and providing psychosocial support for children affected by war (in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua).

5. Immediately after hurricane Mitch struck, UNICEF worked in close cooperation with Governments and other United Nations agencies to respond to the urgent needs created by the emergency. UNICEF country offices distributed essential drugs and chlorine tablets to purify water; assessed the needs of children in shelters and provided health and hygiene education; helped to replace school materials and supplies; provided psychosocial care to children traumatized by the effects of the storm; and helped to rebuild latrines, wells and other essential facilities. Between January and May 1999, UNICEF country offices engaged in a series of medium-term activities such as planning a cholera-prevention programme with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), working with Governments to restore school enrolment and attendance levels, and supporting the work of local institutions and communities for the reconstruction of water and sanitation facilities.

Lessons learned

6. At a meeting in Santo Domingo in February 1999, UNICEF staff from the countries affected by the hurricane met to assess their emergency response and discuss lessons learned from hurricane-related activities. Overall, they concluded that the close linkages between poverty, vulnerability to natural disasters and environmental degradation must be addressed in future programming efforts. All predictions indicate that storms such as Mitch will continue — and even intensify — in the near future, and that Central American populations are highly vulnerable to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions as well as hurricanes. Therefore, reconstruction efforts must now focus on reducing the vulnerability of poor children and communities

to the loss of life and other rights; and support should be provided to national and local governments to create better early warning systems, disaster-response mechanisms and shelters for affected people.

7. One of the key roles of UNICEF in disaster situations, as agreed upon in Santo Domingo, is to promote the concepts of "social" reconstruction and disaster prevention to counter the traditional focus on physical reconstruction. Thus, for example, the reconstruction of water and sanitation facilities should take into account how to prevent their destruction in the future and include hygiene education and disease prevention components. The food and nutrition needs of babies and young children, as well as food security problems facing those whose crops and family gardens were destroyed, must be considered specifically in the larger context of "food needs". UNICEF, it was concluded, should be advocating in favour of the right of all children to be protected against the devastation that natural disasters wreak on them and their families.

Recommended programme cooperation, 1999–2001

8. All four countries have ongoing country programmes which, to some degree, have been adapted to some degree to respond to the changing situation caused by hurricane Mitch. Nevertheless, they remain essentially valid, and cooperation will continue largely as planned. However, each of the four countries directly affected by hurricane Mitch has also developed a package of proposals designed to follow up on activities begun after the storm and to undertake new initiatives to respond to identified needs. The proposals were developed in coordination with host Governments and other United Nations agencies in the spirit of reconstruction with transformation, and with the goal of reducing risk and mitigating the impact of future disasters, as well as recovering from the damage incurred by hurricane Mitch.

9. Many of the programming approaches are similar, given that conditions in rural Central America have a great deal in common and the pattern of the damages from the storm was similar in most countries. Among the strategies common to most of the UNICEF projects are: (a) to improve maternal and child health (MCH) to reduce vulnerability to epidemics; (b) to include hygiene education in basic services and health programmes to reduce vulnerability to disease; (c) to enhance capacity at the community level to improve food security; (d) to provide information and education and build capacity among national and local governments and vulnerable communities in the areas of disaster prevention, mitigation and response; (e) to encourage the participation of children and youth in disaster prevention activities; and (f) to provide psychosocial support to traumatized children.

10. In addition to the four country proposals summarized below, three subregional projects are proposed that involve all of the affected countries and, in some cases, Costa Rica, where the effects of hurricane Mitch were largely indirect, and Panama. The subregional projects address: (a) the rights and needs of children forced to migrate after hurricane Mitch; (b) cholera prevention; and (c) assistance to Governments in the subregion for the development of more effective disaster prevention, mitigation and response mechanisms.

Honduras

11. Honduras was by far the country most heavily damaged by the hurricane, with nearly 6,000 confirmed dead and about 30 per cent of the population directly affected. The projects proposed cover a wide range of needs as a result of the storm and its after-effects. The Honduras country office seeks funds to extend some of its existing pilot projects to communities affected by the storm and to initiate new programmes to prevent and mitigate the damage of disasters. The projects call for: (a) improving public awareness of the rights and needs of children during emergencies and reconstruction; (b) reducing vulnerability to epidemics, especially dengue and malaria; (c) mobilizing schoolchildren and teachers to create gardens and orchards to help meet nutritional and food security needs; (d) Mobilizing community involvement in construction and the management of water, sanitation and hygiene education services; (e) rebuilding damaged child-care facilities and greatly expanding municipal-based child-care services to meet the needs of working mothers; (f) supporting community-based reconstruction of schools and pre-school centres, and providing psychosocial assistance to children; (g) promoting greater social and economic opportunities for women, especially single mothers, through the development of micro-enterprise units; (h) strengthening capacity at the municipal level for managing the risks posed by disasters and rehabilitation in post-disaster situations; and (i) mobilizing poor communities, including children and adolescents, to have greater awareness of environmental issues and thus prevent or mitigate the impact of future natural disasters.

Nicaragua

12. Like Honduras, Nicaragua was one of the poorest countries in Latin America even prior to hurricane Mitch. The storm struck mostly poor, rural areas in the central part of the country, killing more than 3,000 people and destroying 32 per cent of crops. The projects proposed by the Nicaragua country office build on ongoing and emergency-generated activities, and will be carried out in the communities most heavily affected by hurricane Mitch. Support will be provided for national-level activities to prevent an outbreak of cholera, in conjunction with PAHO. Specifically, the role of UNICEF will be to carry out communication/education activities with the media, relevant government agencies and affected communities. There will be an information, education and communication initiative focused on personal hygiene and environmental sanitation to reduce the vulnerability of children in affected communities to communicable diseases, and targeted especially at girls. Efforts will focus on increasing school attendance and improving the quality of primary schools by offering a full-day programme that includes relevant extracurricular activities such as organized sports, health and hygiene education, children's rights, environmental protection, and first aid, and provides a nutritious meal at mid-day. UNICEF will support government efforts to provide appropriate educational and vocational training opportunities for rural youth, including incentives for families, information on reproductive health and early childhood education, and the organization of student brigades to improve environmental conditions at the community level. Government efforts will be supported to expand an existing UNICEF-sponsored rural basic services project (PROSERBI) to 39 additional municipalities seriously affected by hurricane Mitch through capacity-building among local government authorities.

El Salvador

13. Although the hurricane had subsided somewhat by the time it hit El Salvador, it nonetheless inflicted considerable damage to the small country. Three days of tropical rain affected 40 per cent of the country — in mainly poor, rural areas. The lack of a coordinated, well-managed response to the disaster, and the need to amply consider the rights and needs of children and adolescents during these emergencies, point to the need of addressing these aspects in the post-hurricane reconstruction. Most of the proposed activities are targeted to the 37 communities most heavily affected by hurricane Mitch and cover the following areas: (a) support for the creation of "Municipal Defenders of Child Rights" in 32 affected communities (five already have "*Defensorias*"); (b) improve the capacity of local communities and government agencies to reduce vulnerability during emergencies by improving health care in affected communities through the formation of networks of health volunteers; (c) capacity-building for local governments and communities in risk reduction and disaster response; (d) psychosocial support to traumatized children and education of communities in preventing domestic violence, including a needs assessment and training of facilitators and institutional capacity-building; (e) promote the leadership of youth in local reconstruction and disaster prevention programmes and in advocating in favour of children's rights; (f) promote efforts to include the concept of rights within legislation covering disasters, especially the rights of the most vulnerable population; and (g) at the national level, support the development of norms for managing shelters during emergencies.

Guatemala

14. Guatemala is the largest and most heavily populated of the four affected countries, as well as being at high risk for loss of life and other damage from earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, which occur frequently throughout the country. Guatemala is located on three tectonic plates and is home to 40 volcanoes, 5 of which are currently active. Given the widespread nature of vulnerability to disaster in the country, this programme proposes a dual approach in which similar projects are carried out: first, in communities affected by hurricane Mitch during 1999–2000; and second, in contributing to the National Plan for the Prevention and Mitigation of Disasters during 2000–2001, which aims to strengthen the capacities of national institutions as well as of communities to manage disasters. In summary, the project activities proposed are: (a) the reconstruction of water supply and sanitation networks, including their relocation when necessary, and expansion of networks to reach the most vulnerable population, thus reducing their risk from future emergencies; (b) increasing the capacity of local communities to meet food security needs through the construction of small silos and warehouses, and the organization of community dining halls, including training on the need for micronutrients and menus for emergency situations; (c) providing psychosocial assistance to children affected by hurricane Mitch, and the training of teachers in a psychosocial attention model to identify and work with children with special emotional needs; (d) organizing local women's committees and strengthening the capacity of

women's organizations and networks to improve MCH and care for children during emergencies; (e) provide communities with information on disaster prevention, interaction with the environment and risk reduction; (f) the creation of a national information system on vulnerability and social risk during disasters; and (g) building municipal-level capacity for disaster prevention planning.

Subregional projects

15. Three subregional projects are proposed in the wake of hurricane Mitch. The first involves assessment, analysis and action (the "triple A" approach) with regard to child migrants and their families. The storm resulted in considerable migration within and among affected countries and to Costa Rica. In cooperation with the International Organization on Migration, UNICEF proposes to undertake a diagnosis of the extent and nature of migration patterns; an analysis of the current situation of child migrants and their families; and actions to protect the rights of child migrants, when necessary, to ensure their access to health care, education and other rights of which they may be deprived as migrants. The proposed budget is $1,500,000.

16. The second project, cholera prevention and control, has already been designed in conjunction with PAHO. It responds to the increased risk of the spread of epidemics, especially in areas with poor sanitation facilities, following hurricane Mitch. UNICEF and PAHO will collaborate in five basic areas: epidemiological surveillance; environmental sanitation; food handling; social communication/hygiene education; and coordination of strategies and approaches among affected countries. The main contribution of UNICEF will be in the areas of environmental sanitation and social communication/hygiene education, in collaboration with Governments, communities, and the media to help prevent an outbreak of cholera in the affected countries. The proposed budget is $2,500,000, which represents only the as yet unfunded UNICEF portion.

17. Finally, UNICEF proposes a project designed to promote cooperation and build capacity among Central American countries to reduce the social vulnerability to disasters. Working with other United Nations agencies, UNICEF seeks to encourage horizontal cooperation among government agencies and local communities in affected countries; identify and document best practices in disaster prevention and mitigation; promote the concept of children's right to live in a low-risk environment and develop methodologies to include children's rights in disaster prevention planning and programmes; promote systematic exchanges of information and experience; and establish a regional coordination mechanism to track the progress of national and regional efforts. These activities should result in improved planning, coordination, execution and management of disaster-related projects by both Governments and UNICEF. The proposed budget is $1 million covering the period July 1999–2001.

Coordination with partners

18. The projects outlined above were developed in close coordination with Governments and other United Nations agencies. Numerous post-hurricane Mitch government projects were developed in the spring of 1999 in preparation for the meeting of the Consultative Group on Central America, held in Stockholm in May 1999. During this time, UNICEF engaged in ongoing dialogues with Governments to identify aspects of their proposals that represent a logical extension of UNICEF country programmes and in which the agency has a clear comparative advantage.

Programme management

19. The programme will be implemented in a consistent manner with existing programmes of cooperation as well as with current emergency activities funded by the United Nations joint appeal. Each country office will be responsible for programme implementation in its particular country, and the subregional projects will be the joint responsibility of the participating countries and the regional office.

20. A subregional coordination mechanism will be set up in order to have one centralized instance that decides the distribution of the subregional funds, monitors their implementation and, at the same time, fosters the exchange of experiences and reduces duplication of efforts.

Estimated annual expenditure

(In thousands of United States dollars)

	1999	*2000*	*2001*	*Total*
Supplementary funds				
Honduras	1 000	5 000	3 000	9 000
Nicaragua	200	2 300	1 500	4 000
El Salvador	800	1 800	900	3 500
Guatemala	300	2 200	1 000	3 500
Subregional	800	3 000	1 200	5 000
Total	**3 100**	**14 300**	**7 600**	**25 000**